FRⓄNTLINE
Supervisor

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions

How can supervisors help employees maintain a positive mental attitude?

What is Internet addiction and how can I spot whether Internet addiction is affecting productivity? How would you hold an employee accountable if you can't "diagnose" the worker? It seems like a catch-22 to me.

Answers

A If you have a good working relationship with your employees, you can play a constructive role in influencing their positive mental attitude by blending positivity into your supervision style. Here are some ideas: 1) When coaching, remind employees of their capacity to achieve so they "buy in" to their own potential. 2) Encourage employees to embrace personal growth opportunities within the organization and the community. 3) Encourage employees to take chances and think big when it comes to pursuing their goals. 4) When crises occur, model calmness, coolness, and a level-headed response. 5) Encourage employees to develop their passions and find the professional niche that matches their talents and values. 6) Model hope and optimism when the going gets tough. 7) Interrupt negative self-talk and reassure your employees that they have what it takes to win, which will reduce their self-doubt. 8) Encourage employees to "smell the roses" and pursue work-life balance.

A "Internet addiction" is commonly discussed in the media and online, but it is not an official medical diagnosis yet because words like "addiction" (and "disorder") are reserved for accepted medical conditions. Internet addiction also describes many compulsive uses of technology. The preferred term is "compulsive Internet use." Other forms of compulsive use of technology include social media use, such as checking Facebook, gambling, gaming, pornography, shopping, and financial trading. Any of these may negatively impact workplace and personal productivity. Beyond electronic discovery of usage, assignments not delivered on time may be a potential key indicator of compulsive Internet use. Lying about use of time on the job or lying about using the Internet for important business purposes is also common when someone is affected by this. To document productivity issues, assign measurable goals to your employee, such as a certain number of "widgets" or tasks that must be completed on time, weekly.

My employee has been with our organization for a long time. He refuses many assigned duties as well as some that are part of the job description. I don't think anyone in management is willing to consider termination. They want me to "fix" the problem, but I have no leverage. Now what?

Simply put, it appears as though you are unable to direct the employee's work. If true, then you have lost control of the employment relationship. Troubled employees who have gained this sort of leverage over their employers create a lot of risk. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon. Entitlement thinking may lead to bossing coworkers, bullying fellow employees, breaking work rules, end-running managers, and using company property for personal business. Fear of the employee's reaction to confrontation and adapting to avoid it ultimately created this personnel issue. Start by making a formal referral to the EAP. Document the poor cooperation, work refusal, etc. Regardless of whether the employee accepts the referral, you may still meet and consult with the EAP; you may even choose to involve your manager in this meeting. Discuss a concrete action plan. In matters of this type, management teams that focus on a solution usually decide to draw a line and insist on change. The good part is that most are pleasantly surprised at how easily the employee turns around!

I like the concept of "management by wandering around." I read about it in a textbook, but I think employees don't like a supervisor who sneaks around in the workplace. Should I let employees know when I am coming? I think anything less will undermine trust.

Management by wandering around (MBWA) is a supervision technique that is designed to be random or unpredictable. The idea is to better gauge work processes, issues, and problems by showing up unexpectedly. You should also add catching people doing something "right" to this list! No one truly knows where the idea originated, but scheduling visits would undermine its purpose. Letting employees know you involve yourself in this practice, however, would prepare them to be less annoyed when you show up unannounced. Certainly there are employees who do not like surprise visits from wandering management, but what they would resent more is you not caring at all. To make this practice more effective and less intrusive, create a tradition of doing it regularly, and engage with employees along the way by listening to their complaints, ideas, and recommendations for improving productivity. Nearly all employees have some. They'll feel heard and you and your employees will both see value in the practice of management by wandering around.

Can you give me a checklist for counseling employees about their performance to reduce the likelihood that I will leave something out, allowing the employee to manipulate me by saying some element of our discussion was omitted?

Try the following checklist: First, ask the employee how things are going, and whether he or she is having any difficulty with assignments. You'll be surprised at the self-awareness. Next, discuss your concern, and any discrepancy between what you've observed and the employee's self-assessment. Then, tell the employee exactly what expected outcome or result must be achieved. Discuss specific examples of the performance issue in question and how it can be corrected. Before ending the meeting, ask your employee whether he or she understands what needs to be accomplished. Failure to make this clarification will lead to a claim that confusion existed at the end of your meeting. Note: Prior to your meeting, consider your employee's essential duties and performance standards. Are they reasonable? Clarify and affirm that expectations are reasonable, and advocate or make changes, as needed. Also, don't forget to make the EAP a key part of your supervisor's toolbox